

The Court

Word on the street says big Sleepy's trying to creep up on Brenda Sue on the sly. He's been wandering through her gangway like an alley dog, hanging around her back door like he's waiting for somebody to open it up so he can run in. Seems like every time she turns a corner, he's right there trying to force his rap down her ears or trying to put his mouth up in her face. He won't listen when she tells him she don't want to be bothered. He's been acting that way ever since she sat next to him coming back from a field trip their school took to see the Underground Railroad. He must have figured that meant she likes him, knowing there was another empty seat on the bus she could have sat in—the one next to old bubble-lip Rockerfella Pickens. I guess Brenda Sue ain't so good at picking out the best of two evils.

My man Mack, he knows about this mess with Brenda Sue and Sleepy Martin but he ain't wasting no breath talking about what's going on. When I ask him what he thinks about it, all he does is look dead-eyed straight ahead, the same way he does when he's staring down a rim. I know it ain't that this business doesn't bother him none with Sleepy trying to gangster his lady from right under his nose. It's just that since we're supposed to be taking on Sleepy and the Moonwalkers this afternoon, Mack must know proper judgment's going to be passed soon enough.

People done already gathered about the court to witness the game, even Brenda Sue in one of them plaid skirts like the ones they be wearing to Catholic school, along with her creepy, four-eyed looking friend, Me-Me. Me-Me's nose looks more pointed than the wingtips Rev. Sears be wearing on his toes. I wonder if every time I look over there she's already frowning or

if she only be doing that for me. She be scaring me. Maybe she likes me the way Mack says she does, but I ain't about to mess around and blow any chance I might have with Katrina Carr by fooling with her so there ain't no reason for me to be wasting my time. If Brenda Sue's Mack's natural-born soul mate, I think Katrina must be mine. Besides, don't nobody want to get stuck with no girl who tries to speak all proper like she done swallowed somebody's grammar book and it didn't go down right—a girl who goes around trying to sound like the white girls do but whose words still come out sounding like they colored. I bet most prissy-acting girls like her probably don't even know how white folks sound. After all I've done to make people in the 'hood see that I ain't no straight-laced square, I ain't about to be seen messing around with nobody like her. In Bluesville, you get respected more for being an average hucklebutt than you do for being a Mr. Peabody.

Them Moonwalkers must think being late is the way to style, but if they do they the only ones. It's way past three-thirty and they ain't showed up yet, and we said we were going to start by three. Some of the cats over by the fence are already saying they done chickened out, that they done turned yellow as they teeth. I look at Mack—I can tell that ain't what he's thinking. He's practicing his jumper, sticking it through the hoop. It tickles the net real sweet each time it drops through. He ain't even satisfied when the rock goes in the hole if it catches any rim. Mack's got a look on his face like a surgeon sharpening up his blade before an operation. He knows them Moonwalkers are going to show, and he got his mind set on getting his justice.

All of a sudden, they come trotting out from behind the Dred Scott school building. Few of us on either side go to Dred Scott for junior high, but it's middle ground between Thomas Auld, where I go, and Stephen Douglas on the Moonwalker's turf, so that's where we decide to play. It would have been great to play in the gym at Booker T. Washington, but they never open

the gym for pick-up games, and the rims over at Trueblood are for babies. The Moonwalkers are running around pumping their fists in the air like they bad or something, all of them except for long tall Sleepy. I've got a habit of looking off, least that's what I've been told, so that's why I'm the only one who sees Sleepy slipping up from the other direction sliding up to Brenda Sue like he's slick. He taps her on one shoulder and ducks around to her other side. When she looks, she don't see nothing. Startled, she jerks her head back the other way real quick, her long, silky, Pocahontas-looking hair flying about from side to side, only to find Sleepy's lips all puckered up and kissing at her mug. Brenda Sue stumbles back with one of them "how dare you" looks painted on her face, but Sleepy, his eyes all bloodshot, I can even smell the Mad Dog 20-20 he been drinking over here, grabs her by the arm and pulls her up to him like she's his piece to do with whatever he wants. Mack looks like he ain't even looking, but I know he knows what's going down. Brenda Sue tries to pull away, but Sleepy, thinking he got arm when all he got is sweater sleeve, won't let go and the sleeve starts stretching like a sling. Finally, it pops out of Sleepy's grip and Brenda Sue falls back like she's been pushed. Luckily, Me-Me, who's been standing back of her all along, keeps her from falling down.

Sleepy ain't finished. He starts raising his foot to step over to where Brenda Sue's now standing, but the rock comes whizzing by his twelve-and-a-half like a canon shot, making him pull it back. It bounces all the way to the fence. Mack threw the ball but he still ain't showing much of nothing on his face. He just says, "You ready to get down, Miss Dick's son?" Sleepy don't be liking nobody using his old bird's last name, especially since anytime anybody wants to run the dozens on him they try saying Miss Dixon in a way that's supposed to make it sound like his momma ain't nothing but a penis. That don't make too much sense to me, but it gets him mad as hell. After that, everybody who's been messing around over by the fence stop what they doing

and focus they eyes on the court.

Usually, not this many people hang out at one court watching a game. Most of the hard-legs would be over on the other ones playing H-O-R-S-E or Twenty-One. But the other hoops are empty, except for one where a couple of little boys are shooting jumpers with somebody's old shoe. Since most folks know this game's going to have the whole 'hood buzzing for a long time, they reckon it's best to be here in person, that way they won't have to cop no pleas down the line when somebody calls them a liar for trying to say they was here when they wasn't.

Monkey Jr.'s so fast he's done gone and got the rock already. He lobs it back to Mack, but Mack fires it at Sleepy's stomach and says, "Shoot at the line for first out." Sleepy, trying not to lose no cool, fixes them black-dotted red balls in his head on Mack with a look in them that could kill, but Mack just walks away acting like he ain't paying Sleepy no mind.

Sleepy bounces the rubber hard on concrete three or four times two-handed. He throws up a shot that bounces one, two, three times on the rim and falls through. He starts smiling like he knows he done did something. He even jumps over to the rim to retrieve the rock. Now Mack steps up to the line. Sleepy fires the pill at him hard, but Mack reaches out and catches it with one hand. Standing side-turned to the basket, Mack flicks his wrist and watches us as we watch his shot float through the air like a sparrow in a late summer breeze. It sails out of the sky and drops through the hoop like it's found its natural born home—not ticking nothing. Sleepy's eyes come alive. They dart back and forth all over his head. Mack, he's just there. The crowd's done got so loud and heated up that you can't even hear any of the empty beer and wine bottles being smashed on the ground.

John Caven steps up to the line next. He hits for them, but so does Treetop for us. Next, for the 'Walkers, Rico makes his shot but Gator throws one down right behind him for us. Now,

they send J.D. up to the line—he takes his shot and gets a prayer answered. I’m starting to feel a bit uptight. After Monkey Jr. shoots for us it’s going to be my turn, and all I need is to be the first one to miss. It seems like everybody’s already got their eyes on me because almost all the dudes on the sidelines would like to take my place. They try to say that I can’t get up, that I can’t hang, but I am a member of the Colored Avengers and ain’t nobody on our squad asked me to get out the game. Everybody on the ‘Vengers treat me like I’m as down as anybody else; that’s because they know I always try to play real hard. But since I don’t style, every once in a while somebody in the peanut gallery says I play like a tubob. Least when we play, I know my team be winning.

It’s Monkey Jr. who misses, and I know he’s cursing up a storm under his breath. He plays like me but can run a lot faster, and most of the time he handles the rock. I don’t dribble very good, but both me and Monk play defense slick as eels, although everybody else thinks that’s boring. In fact, when the Moonwalkers try to take the ball from out-of-bounds, Monk steals it. He passes the rock to me, but it bounces right off my big head since I’m paying only half-attention. That’s because I can’t help but look at Brenda Sue over there under the school yard tree with Me-Me. She’s crying and Me-Me’s holding her, talking in her ear. Looks like Me-Me’s trying to pep her up so she won’t feel so bad; ‘least that’s what it looks like she’s doing. I didn’t know Me-Me could be so caring. Now somebody’s whacking me in the back. It’s Gator. He tells me, “C’me on June Bug, get your butt in the game.”

The Moonwalkers are as tall as Wilt and the rest of the 76ers’ front line, and run up and down the court as fast as the St. Louis Hawks. All of them are already in high school, or at least high school age, while all of us still go to Thomas Auld. Now since they got Big Rico on their team, they’re even taller than they used to be. Quentin Boyer used to play with them but he was too much like me and they cut him loose. Rico’s tall as Sleepy, and they both look taller than

Treetop. Gator's our second tallest guy, but he looks like a linebacker who don't need no shoulder pads and he ain't much taller than me or Monk. First time down, John Caven, who's also taller than all of us, throws up a crip that goes in the hole. Gator tells him, "Ain't no more of that shit going in." I throw the ball into Monk and he starts flying up court but when he gets to our end, he stops his dribble. He sees something strange. I see it too. Sleepy's not guarding Treetop like he always does—he's trying to stick Mack instead. But Rico's sticking Mack, too. Monk looks over and sees Top standing there all alone, as open as the legs on a five dollar ho'. Monk bounces Top the ball and he jams it. Dudes on the sidelines slap fives. Rico and Sleepy start arguing over who's sticking who. Sleepy pleads, "Come on man, let me have him." Rico says, "Cool." They slap palms and jog back up court. Now Mack yells at Sleepy and follows him back toward the Moonwalkers' basket. He tells him, "You want me, sucker? Well, you're going to get me." Under they basket, Mack and Top swap eyes, and Mack picks up Sleepy while Top moves over on Rico. J.D. sees what the deal is and lobs Sleepy the ball, but Sleepy's feet start moving when he catches it before he can put the rock on the ground. I'm the one who hollers "Steps!" Mack gives me five and says, "Bugs, way to get yourself in the game."

Still, we start losing real quick. The Moonwalkers go up 14-4 counting by twos. Sleepy's done slapped Mack's shot back three or four times because J.D. and Kayo help him out every time Mack gets his hands on the ball. Mack keeps passing the rock to me because I'm being left wide open, but I pass it right back to him. I really don't want to shoot since I might miss and then everybody over on the sidelines will start talking smack about my game. Mack tells both me and Monk, "You got to take the open shot," but Monk ain't no quicker to shoot the rock than me.

Zera and the Bosco Babes come walking up; of course, nobody calls them that but us. They're all dressed up in look-alike shorts and T-shirts and they're swinging towels around in

the air like pom-poms, so I guess they supposed to be somebody's cheerleaders. Zera's Sleepy's natural woman without a doubt. She's milk chocolate like him, wears her short hair all plaited up, and can curse so bad she can make sin back down. She looks over at Brenda Sue with death in her eyes and Brenda Sue sees it. Brenda Sue gives her a look back that's innocent and sorry at the same time, but Zera acts like she don't be caring none. They crowd don't like us at all, even when we try to get along. Still, dudes like Sleepy always be trying to cop one of the girls from our crowd on the sly—I bet he'd even try to mack up on Katrina if he could. It seems like they must think if they can get a girl like Brenda Sue then they won't have to feel so shamed about being so countrified. Not that anybody cares about the way they act or look, except for them. In fact, both Monkey Jr. and Treetop are as dark as Sleepy and the rest of his gang no matter what kind of way you look at it, but it just don't seem to bother my partners that much. Just because they hang with us, like we're supposed to be so light or talk so good, Monk and Top get hated like we do. Still, don't none of us be backing down. They tell us we "bleached" and say we had white daddies, but we call them cotton-picking tar babies and call they crowd the *Bosco* Brigade.

I just can't help thinking about it, maybe because it seems so dumb, but if Sleepy and the 'Walkers win he ain't about to get nothing out of it but bragging rights—Brenda Sue would stay in her house for the rest of her life before she'd let him get next to her. If they win the game, all Sleepy will have done is knock Mack out the box for nothing. Everybody's known that Mack and Brenda Sue would be getting together since we were all together in fifth grade, so all Sleepy's bound to do is mess them up just so he can get him a lady in name only. If Katrina was my lady, no way would I ever go through with no stuff like this—no way would I let her be put on the line to be won like she wasn't no more than a trophy or something to be bragged about. But Mack looks at things different: he says all of us have to live by the rules of the 'hood.

Zera and her girls start doing their chants:

Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang,

Ain't nuthin but ah 'Walkers thang.

They're really getting the crowd into it. Before the game everybody figured we were going to win since they knew what the showdown was all about, but we're losing so now the 'Walkers got the crowd on a string. Mostly everybody done drifted to their end of the court. Brenda Sue and Me-Me's over on our end by themselves. Gator puts the rock down, poops his butt out to make a path, and starts backing himself toward the basket. Under the hoop he pumps, but doesn't make a move. Now he pumps again and Caven springs up like he's been faked out of his jumpers. Gator shoots it up, but Rico, after dropping off his man, leaps up and blocks it.

Mack grabs the loose rock and starts to shoot, but both Kayo and Caven jump into him. Kayo hits him on the arm while he's shooting and that makes the ball hang there a few feet up in the air like it's not going anywhere in particular. Mack calls foul, but Sleepy jumps up anyway and slaps the ball away like he's blocking a real shot. He sends it crying up court, baby-bouncing along like it's gotten its feelings hurt. Now Sleepy lets out all kind of whoops and screams, acting like he's just scarred up Cassius Clay's face, or done racked up Jim Brown so bad he can't get up. Mack, he just stands there.

The crowd, smelling blood, really starts buzzing. The Bosco Babes sing:

V-I-C-I-O-U-S

Are We Vicious?

HELL Yes!

Brenda Sue and Me-Me look like they seeing things that ain't good, right, and holy. They look like they don't want to believe what's going on but know they have to. Sleepy's dancing all up

and down like he's in church and just got the Holy Ghost for the first time. He looks at Brenda Sue and says, "Baby love, you going to be mine tonight." Zera adds, "Yeah, but not without a million scratches on that stuck-up face." Brenda Sue looks like she's afraid they both might turn out to be right.

I start to take the ball out and give it to Monk, but Mack's got a look in his eye like he wants it, so I toss it in to him. He takes a dribble and then launches a twenty-five footer like Walt Frazier. Ain't nobody close as ten feet to him when he shoots, but he don't care. *Swish*. Even before the ball hit the ground after going through the basket all the noise from around the court disappears. Before the lull gets a chance to set in good, Brenda Sue and Me-Me start yelling:

Come on A-Men, let's go!

Come on A-Men, let's go!

Kayo dribbles the rock down court but starts looking around like he's confused by the sudden silence. Me and Monk try to mug him and he panics. He tries to flip the ball to J.D., but I stick my arm up and it hits it. It bounces to Monk and he takes off. Monk hits a crip and runs back over to help me press some more. They try to take it out of bounds but we swipe the rock again. This time Gator comes over and I pass to him. He knocks down a little turn-around jumper before the long-talls can get up court. The crowd starts getting into it again, but this time all the buzzing's got a different tone.

Just about everybody's done drifted back to mid-court. A minute ago we were being treated like we'd already been convicted, but now our jury's acting like all the testimony's not in yet, especially seeing Sleepy miss a short jumper and Mack coming back and throwing down a thirty-footer like he ain't doing no more than throwing pennies in a well. They take it back down to they end and Rico tries a shot, but Treetop pins it to the board. Top grabs the ball and fires it

to Mack, but before he can get off another jumper they get him in a double team. He bounces the rock my way and I throw up a jumper from the side that catches rim and then drops. The crowd goes wild. I hear what sounds like a million voices shouting “*June Bug! June Bug! June Bug!*” Monk and Treetop give me fives and I can’t help but to smile. Mack takes me by the shoulder and says, “That’s it, Bugs. We got them suckers now.”

We reach 28 before they get to 20. Game’s 32. Brenda Sue and Me-Me look real happy. But I can see the game ain’t hardly over. The Moonwalkers done started playing like they’re more interested in hacking than scoring points. Every time one of us makes a move with the ball they hit us on the arm, in the head, or try low-bridging us. Then they yell and argue they ain’t made no foul. But every time they throw up a brick that knows it ain’t got no business going in they scream “foul,” even when nothing ain’t touched them, not even wind.

After six or seven misses and six or seven straight fouls, John Caven tries to drive to the basket. He carries the ball on his hip and then charges into Treetop—he not only almost runs Top over, but he nearly knocks his head off with an elbow. Top calls foul while he’s holding his head, but Caven banks the ball into the basket and then starts claiming what he did to Top ain’t a violation of nobody’s law. Even the folks on the sides know it’s some bogus stuff he’s pulling, because Killjoy and several of his winehead buddies tell him to give it up and quit cheating, and everybody knows when he ain’t begging quarters a winehead’s the most impartial judge you can get. Top bends over with his hand on his eye, somehow it’s gotten all red and swollen, but Caven still swears he ain’t touched him. Top’s pissed off. He spits all over the place like he does when he’s mad. But while we’re walking up to our end of the court, Mack says “Come on now, just keep playing ball. All we got to do is keep playing ball.”

The ball’s passed to me, but I pass it back to Mack. It comes to me again, but I give it

back to Mack a second time. He's got two Moonwalkers sticking on him and can't get off a shot. He passes it back to me along with a look on his face that says—"Look sucker, you *better* shoot this time." I toss it right up, but I act without thinking. I don't set before I shoot so the ball goes up like a wounded bird fluttering in the air. J.D. gets the air-ball and he and Kayo fly on down to their end of the court. They go two-on-one on Monkey Jr. and score. I know I should have dropped back on defense, but I hear it from Top and Gator, anyway: "Boy, get your ass back." I try my best to avoid Mack's eyes as I run past him, but all he says is "Keep on shooting, June Bug. Keep throwing it up." He doesn't even say anything about my bad shot or about me not dropping back on d'. The score's 28-24 and I don't think I should be the one to take any shots, but while we're waiting for Monkey Jr. to bring the ball up court Mack says it again: "Bugs, when you get the rock, put it up." Ain't too much for me to say but "Okay."

Gator tries a scoop shot from under our basket but winds up lying on his tail. He gets up and jumps at Rico like he wants a piece of his behind, but Mack and Top slow him down. Monk thinks like me—ain't no way we going to get too close to Gator when he's hot because sometimes he loses track of who he be meaning to rack up. I grab the ball to take it out, but Sleepy tries to snatch it. He says, "Ain't nobody called no foul." But I won't give it up because I know it was a foul. I curl myself over to protect the ball, but the next thing I know I'm being thrown to the ground and the ball's being ripped out my hands. When I look up, Me-Me's standing over me saying "J.P. Bailey, are you all right?" I do my best to ignore her since there ain't too much hurt other than feelings. I jump up fast and look around like I'm ready to jump bad if Sleepy ain't run off somewhere. Of course, he's already gone up court.

As I run back to the Moonwalkers' end, they've already got the ball in play. Sleepy takes the rock and sets himself to launch a long jumper. He usually plays inside but now he's acting

like he's a gunner. Mack goes up after him like he's going for the block, but his arms don't try to slap at the ball. Instead, his hand whacks Sleepy up side the head hard enough to give him a case of whiplash. Sleepy lands on his knees and jumps right up like he wants some action. He puts his fists up in the air but Mack ignores him and fires the rock to me at mid-court. Nobody else makes a move. I make sure I catch the ball but after that I don't move, either. I don't want to miss a thing. Sleepy rocks his arms from left to right, acting like he's a boxer in the ring. Ain't no noise to be heard coming from anywhere except for the swaying of his elbows whipping up a breeze, but Mack ain't moved at all. He just keeps looking Sleepy dead-eye in the face and walks toward him like he don't even see him—like he's about to walk right through him. Now, all of a sudden, Mack sticks a finger through Sleepy's swinging arms, pokes it up in his face, and says in a voice real loud: "You ain't called 'foul' neither, chump." Everybody starts cracking up.

Sounds of yips, whoops, and howls come from all over as everybody starts mocking Sleepy. I take a few dribbles and shoot the easiest basket I ever will make, only I miss. But since there's no one close, there's more than enough time for me to do it again right. Nobody even comes to try and stop me.

The Moonwalkers have lost, and everybody knows it. They don't even look like they want to try no more since we only need another bucket to win. J.D. throws the ball in bounds for them, but nobody on their team tries to catch it. Gator grabs it and ships a pass back up to me, so I get a chance to make the game-winning shot. It's like gravy. But from what I'm hearing as the ball falls through the hoop, I know nothing ain't been settled yet.

Old Killjoy grabs hold of me before I even think about doing any celebrating and says, "You all done won the game, now you going to have to win the fight." I think we ain't fighting nobody, at least I'm hoping we're not. We got Mack his judgment and the whole 'hood saw it

was done fair and square, but my ears can't ignore the sound of Sleepy yelling to everyone, including God Almighty sitting up on his throne: "Ya'll cheated. You muddafuckas think you slick, but ya'll ain't getting away with shit."

Sleepy pulls a blade out of his pocket and starts pointing it all around. When he spots Mack, he sticks it out toward him. Everybody gathers in a circle so they can get a better view of the action. Since Sleepy's done shown metal he's going to have to use metal, else he stands walking away with his shit smeared in his own face. He moves after Mack but Mack ain't backing down any. Mack ain't nothing if he ain't my buddy, and I'll be damned if I don't try to help him out, but Gator and Treetop won't let me. Monkey Jr. says I know as well as he do that it has to be one-on-one, but I don't care. I just can't break away from all the hands holding me back. I'm scared for Mack. So is Brenda Sue. She's crying her head off to Jesus, trying to beg an angel up on the scene to keep her guy from getting his soul all shredded up to pieces. I see that even the hoodoo lady who lives in the big Hansen Courtyard Apartments building on the corner of my block has shown up to take in the action from the far end of the fence. Maybe she's just looking for that crazy girl who lives with her.

Sleepy swings the blade, but Mack's too quick. It don't even seem like he's looking at the knife the way he keeps staring Sleepy in the eye. It almost looks like he's looking dead into Sleepy's brain. Sleepy fakes a looping sidearm swing but lunges straight ahead, instead. Mack's not caught off guard and steps to the side like he's playing matador. Sleepy's momentum takes him a couple of steps past Mack who, with both hands clasped, crashes a sledgehammer blow into the small of Sleepy's back. Eyes pop out from all over the place as they see Sleepy hit concrete like a just-dropped ironing board.

Sleepy gets up with all kind of demons in his eyes, but Mack still ain't backing down at

all. Mack grabs the ball and sticks it out in front of him like a big oval shield. Every angle Sleepy tries to get at Mack, he finds the ball sticking out blocking the way. He looks like he's getting madder and madder, like now he's even getting mad at the ball. So instead of trying to slice Mack, it looks like all he wants to do is dick the ball with his blade. But Mack keeps moving the ball out of the way, and as hard as Sleepy tries he can't make contact with anything but air.

Now Sleepy's so hot he looks like he's about ready to put all he's got into one killing blow. He sees the rock stuck out there real still—it's big and sweet looking like a humongous cantaloupe on the kitchen table. Sleepy comes down with a great overhand right with the knife headed straight into the ball, but before the blade touches rubber Mack pulls it back. Then he cocks his right hand and fires the rock. It knocks Sleepy upside the head so hard it looks like a boulder just hit him. Mack follows with knuckles. The knife goes flying one way, Sleepy the other, and both lie there stretched out on the ground for a hot second. Now Sleepy gets up like he wants to go some more skin-on-skin, but Zera jumps all over him as quick as the flash from a camera. She slaps him around worse than Mack ever did and yells for him to go his ass home.

“Ain't you done already made a big enough fool out yourself?”

Everybody sees it's over, so most folks take and cut out. While Zera marches Sleepy away, I look but I don't see none of his buddies. They done all spaced. Me and Mack slap hands with Gator, Monk and Top, and they start telling us about the Jerry Lewis movie that's playing over at the Capitol. They ask us if we're coming, but Mack says “no” for us both, even though my toes done already started inching forward toward the show. I know I'm already in trouble for being out so long, so I figure I might as well take full advantage of my coming punishment. Mack, however, tells the gang, “Me and Bug's got some business to take care of, we'll catch you all later.” The three of them say “Easy” and start stepping it off. Gator, however, looks back and

says, “Yeah, I see what kind of business you got.”

I turn and see Brenda Sue and Me-Me standing there like they waiting for they long lost men to return from the war. The problem is Me-Me’s waiting for me. We turn toward where they’re standing and Mack starts walking on ahead. He puts an arm around Brenda Sue’s waist and pulls her close to him. I look at Me-Me and see she ain’t frowning for once and she’s wearing her glasses in her hand—not on her nose—and they look much better there. I walk up to her but I really don’t know what to say, so I ask her what high school she plans to attend next year, Booker T. Washington or Samuel Jenkins? She giggles a little, but it’s a cute little giggle so I don’t mind too much. Still, I can’t help but to see pictures of Katrina in my mind. I wonder where she’s at and what she’s doing. I wish it wasn’t against her mother’s rules for her to come over to the school yard to see us play. I look over at Mack to see what he’s doing, but what I see makes me stop thinking about Katrina.

Mack’s got Brenda Sue in a vice-grip and looks to be speaking something soft but forceful in her ear while kissing at her face. I can make out him saying, “Come on sugar, ain’t I earned *it* this time?” But Brenda Sue’s replies ain’t no whispers. I can hear her say, “No, Mack! No, Mack! No!” I can also hear the sound of tears in her voice. After all we went through to liberate her, what in the world could be bothering her now? Me-Me taps me on my shoulder and says, “Look J.P., I think you better go get your friend. He’s deranged!” Her glasses are back on her nose and nothing about her expression looks cute anymore.

Mack pulls Brenda Sue’s face toward his lips. He says something else, then takes and fondles her behind. She pulls back and takes a wild swing with her free hand, landing a roundhouse on the side of his head. It doesn’t faze him, he doesn’t even budge, but it’s kind of obvious that the force of the impact hurt her hand. Brenda Sue falls to the ground doubled over.

She calls Mack a no good filthy dog and starts spitting at his feet.

“You’re no better than they are. You’re no better, at all.”

Mack yells for me, “Come on, Bugs, let’s space,” and starts walking away. I take two or three steps forward but then stop.

“What’s going on?” I find myself yelling toward an empty sidewalk next to the darkened playground. “What the hell’s going on?”

“June, that’s what I want to know—what’s in heaven’s name is going on?”

That’s when I hear her, but I don’t see her at first. For an old woman you wouldn’t think she’d be able to sneak around like that or to chase me down so far from home—the court is way on the other side of the lower west end from where we live. But she’s caught me again; now I’ve got to go home and get on my knees and do some hard penance.